



# FAIR HOUSING NEWS

Produced by the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

Volume II — 2021

## 2021: Toward the Goal of Justice Together: FHCWM Online!

The Fair Housing Center is very pleased to share that more than 325 people attended the Annual *Fair Housing Workshop Series* on Thursday, April 22, 2021—the first online Fair Housing month conference in the Center’s 40+ year history! The event kicked-off with virtual networking at ‘tables’ in the online platform and an inspiring plenary session from Dr. George Lipsitz (Research Professor Emeritus of Black Studies and Sociology-University of California, Santa Barbara), titled *Longing for Justice Together in the Midnight Hour: Why Fair Housing Matters Now*. Dr. Lipsitz reminded us that the people that we meet along the way make this struggle worthwhile and challenged us to turn ‘bystanders into upstanders’. Our guests then had their choice of two powerful morning workshops: *Tackling Tough Topics to Ensure Fair Housing Compliance* and *Understanding & Effectively Combating Sales Discrimination*. The event then continued with remarks by Nancy Haynes (FHCWM Executive Director); she acknowledged the panelists and moderators before introducing the Fair Housing Award

(FHCWM Board Member, Fifth Third Bank—retired) honoring his vision for fair housing in west Michigan and all of his hard work as a Board Member for over 18 years! Ms. Haynes then introduced Grand Rapids Poet Laureate Ericka “Kyd Kane” Thompson, who performed a brand new poem commissioned for this event, “no tables,



*Kyd Kane performing*

no homes, no equity”. The FHCWM is fortunate to have the opportunity to work with Ms. Thompson as part of the Center’s Writing to Right Wrongs program, which is fair housing high school curricula delivered in partnership with teaching artists of The Diatribe. Ms. Haynes then introduced keynote speaker Bryan Greene, the Vice President of Policy Advocacy at the National Association of REALTORS®, who shared information on their efforts underway to change the culture of the real estate industry and increase accountability and training. We are thankful to KBO Group, who helped the FHCWM make this transition online in a socially distanced, state of the art studio! A sincere thank you to all who attended to mark this special occasion, especially our sponsors ([www.fhcwm.org/lws/sponsors](http://www.fhcwm.org/lws/sponsors)) who made the day possible, and our incredible panelists and speakers!

presentation segment. Doretha Ardoin (FHCWM Board President, Greenridge Realty) presented the 2021 Fair Housing Award to Patrick Lonergan



*D. Ardoin & P. Lonergan*

## HUD Expands LGBTQ National Protections

February 11, 2021 - HUD announced that it will administer and enforce the Fair Housing Act to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. HUD’s Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity issued a memorandum stating that HUD interprets the Fair Housing Act to bar discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity and directing HUD offices and recipients of HUD funds (including the FHCWM) to enforce the Act accordingly. The memorandum begins the implementation of the policy set forth in President Biden’s Executive Order 13988, which directed executive branch agencies to examine further steps that could be taken to combat such discrimination. HUD officials said there were 197 claims of housing discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity filed in the last year. Further, HUD will apply these protections retroactively and will review and investigate all allegations of housing discrimination that were filed since January 20, 2020.

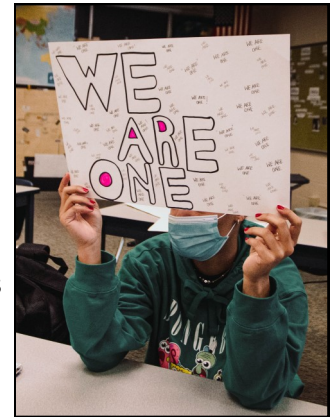
### **Inside this issue:**

33rd Annual Fair Housing Event .....	1
LGBTQ Protections.....	1
Membership & Year End Giving.....	2
33rd Annual Event Workshops .....	2
Fair Housing Article on Assistance Animals .....	3
Staff Update.....	4
NEWSLETTER ANNOUNCEMENT.....	4

# ...Fair Housing Center Notes & News...

## Membership & Donations Making an Impact

The Center has been proactively preventing and eliminating illegal housing discrimination thus ensuring equal housing opportunity for all for **41 years**. The support of our members and the community has made this possible and for this, we are entirely grateful! The Center is committed to addressing housing discrimination head on, which includes providing innovative programming and expert-level education on fair housing laws – a uniquely successful approach in the fair housing movement. In 2020, the Center provided comprehensive fair housing education and outreach services to over 17,000 people. Through all of its efforts, the Center opened up housing opportunities from discrimination for over 74,000 individuals and/or families throughout west Michigan. When you give, you help us provide vital education on fair housing laws and practices, research the state of housing discrimination in communities, and restore housing choice to people who may have been discriminated against. You have the power to further fair housing efforts by providing much needed support for programs and services that would otherwise go unfunded. **Learn more and join online at [www.fhccwm.org/giving](http://www.fhccwm.org/giving).**



*Student during Writing to Right Wrongs program*

## 33rd Annual Fair Housing Event Workshops

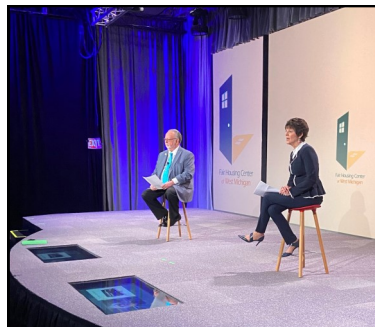
This year's concurrent morning workshops were attended by 234 housing professionals, community members, and advocates.

The **Tackling Tough Topics to Ensure Fair Housing Compliance** workshop was introduced and moderated by Elizabeth Stoddard (Director of Advocacy, FHCWM). This 2-hour session began with an overview of Michigan's fair housing protections under the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act from René Hoffmann (Civil Rights Investigator with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights); she also provided an overview of the Department's services and how complaints can be filed. Anchor panelist Sara Pratt (Counsel, Relman Colfax) then comprehensively covered some of the more challenging topics under fair housing, such as national origin discrimination, sexual harassment, criminal history screening, accommodations or modifications for people with disabilities, and more. Prior to joining Relman Colfax, Ms. Pratt was Deputy Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing Enforcement and Programs and Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary at HUD. This workshop was made possible through the support of the City of Grand Rapids Community Development Department.



The **Understanding & Effectively Combating Sales Discrimination** workshop opened with Keith Herbert giving an overview of an undercover real estate investigation on Long Island conducted by Newsday, an award-winning daily New York newspaper. He was a key member of the Newsday "Long Island Divided" team, and shared not only information but also multiple videos of footage from their extensive project and paired-testing effort. Mr. Herbert was joined by Fred Freiberg (Executive Director, Fair Housing Justice Center), a consultant for Newsday who organized the testing and evaluated the test results. Bryan Greene (Vice President, Policy Advocacy, National Association of REALTORS) and Becky

Gean (Legal Affairs Manager, Michigan REALTORS) moved the conversation forward by sharing educational and best practice resource information from the Real Estate Professional perspective; the workshop was co-moderated by Julie Rietberg (Chief Executive Officer, Greater Regional Alliance of REALTORS) and Dale Zahn (Chief Executive Officer, West Michigan Lakeshore Association of REALTORS). This workshop offered 2 hours of Continuing Education for real estate professionals and was made possible by the County of Kent.



*(D. Zahn, J. Rietberg live in studio)*



**Fair Housing Center  
of West Michigan**  
20 Hall Street SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49507  
T: (616) 451-2980 or  
1-866-389-FAIR

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# ...Fair Housing Center Notes & News...

## What protections do people with disabilities have? Fair Housing, Assistance Animals, and More

Persons with various types of disabilities may need an assistance animal in their home in order to have an equal opportunity to use and enjoy their housing. Housing providers and landlords have a legal obligation to allow assistance animals in their properties if they are necessary because of a disability. Assistance animals are not pets. Housing providers and landlords can have any type of policy, fee, or limit on animals that are pets. Assistance animals are permitted for people with disabilities under the federal Fair Housing Act because it is illegal to discriminate against someone based on a physical or mental disability. Fair housing laws also prohibit discrimination in housing based on race, skin color, religion, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), having children, whether someone is married, and age.

The Fair Housing Act defines a person with a disability as someone with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities and includes a record of impairment even if you have recovered, or being regarded as others as having an impairment, even if untrue. Major life activities include caring for yourself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working. This definition includes those with physical ailments and emotional or mental illnesses as well as those who do not have a disability but are assumed to by others.

Fair housing laws grant people with disabilities the right to seek reasonable modifications and accommodations to make their housing and communities easier to use and access. Modifications are physical changes that make an apartment accessible, like a ramp or hand rail. Accommodations are changes or exceptions to any rule, policy, procedure, or service needed in order for a person with a disability to be able to have equal access to and full enjoyment of their home. Assistance animals are an example of a reasonable accommodation; another is requesting a designated accessible parking space. Housing providers, like [AGENCY NAME], are required by law to evaluate each reasonable accommodation request carefully. They also have to maintain confidentiality to the best of their ability. People with disabilities can request these changes at any time – before they move or after they have been living in the community for many years.

There are two types of assistance animals: (1) *service animals* (limited to dogs or at times miniature horses), and (2) other trained or untrained animals that do work, perform tasks, provide assistance, and/or provide therapeutic emotional support for individuals with disabilities (referred to by HUD as a “*support animal*”). Service dogs perform many disability-related functions, including guiding individuals who are blind or have low vision and alerting persons to impending seizures. People who have service dogs are usually trained to work closely with their service animal. Trained service dogs are allowed to go in public spaces, such as restaurants and stores, under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Support animals are not; they are limited to housing.

Other examples of tasks or assistance that animals can provide include preventing or interrupting impulsive or destructive behaviors or taking action to calm a person during an anxiety attack. They can also provide emotional support that alleviates at least one identified symptom of a disability. Support animals do not need to be trained, certified, or licensed but they, along with service dogs, must be kept under control at all times. Service and support animals also need to be in compliance with any existing animal laws, such as licensing, vaccination, identification, and leashing laws. Owners of assistance animals must take care (or arrange for care) of the animal, including cleaning up after it. Owners of assistance animals must also comply with the property’s rules regarding noise, safety, disruption, and cleanliness – as must all residents.

If an animal (be it a pet if allowed or an assistance animal) is not under the owner’s control, it’s a good idea to report those incidences to the apartment manager [TITLE/CONTACT]. They will then document the issue and look into the matter. Housing providers are required by law to work with the assistance animal owner in an interactive process. They can work with the resident to ensure that the animal is well maintained and controlled as required by policy.

If you have additional questions about assistance animals, reasonable modifications or reasonable accommodations, or if you would like assistance in requesting a reasonable modification or accommodation, **please contact the Fair Housing Center of West Michigan office at (616) 451-2980**. For more resources: <http://www.fhcwm.org/disability>.

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**Please visit our web site: [www.fhcwm.org](http://www.fhcwm.org)**

# ...Fair Housing Center News & Events...

## The FHCWM Says Goodbye and Welcomes New Staff!

The FHCWM is grateful to **George Jeffries**, our former Intake Specialist & Office Coordinator, for all of your hard work and sharing your talents, experience, and famous smile with us for more than 6 years. We miss you George, and wish you all the best in your new field! The FHCWM is excited to welcome **Allison French** as our new Intake and Office Coordinator; **Sarah Brandt** as our new Testing Coordinator; and **Annie Schira** as our new Enforcement Coordinator. These wonderful additions represent significant growth and increased capacity for the FHCWM! Please join us in giving a very warm welcome to Allison, Sarah, and Annie!

## FHCWM Moving to Electronic Newsletters!



The FHCWM is making plans to transition to electronic newsletters. If you want to stay connected, please reach out and let us know! We are collecting preferred email contact information from our loyal readers. Send Brianna Miranda an email at [bmiranda@fhcwm.org](mailto:bmiranda@fhcwm.org) or call our office for assistance. Please note that if you have unsubscribed to email notifications from the FHCWM in the past, we can work together to re-subscribe you.

## Fair Housing Trainings

The Fair Housing Center offers a variety of fair housing trainings focusing on awareness and/or compliance with the law, including *Know Your Fair Housing Rights* and *Fair Housing Training for Rental or Sales Professionals* sessions of varying lengths. Trainings can be customized based on the experience of attendees and the topics desired. Costs vary depending on the type of training; the FHCWM is able to offer some trainings at no or limited cost. Contact Liz Keegan or Brianna Miranda at (616) 451-2980 to learn more or request a quote.

**Check our website home page for upcoming dates: [www.fhcwm.org](http://www.fhcwm.org).**

The Fair Housing Center hosts **tester trainings** on a regular basis. Testers are volunteers that play the role of a homeseeker and receive a stipend in return for their time and services. To inquire about registering or learn more contact Sarah Brandt at (616) 438-5712.

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